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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the idea that the study of language standards and standard languages must make reference to a different level of consciousness from that associated with the sort of naive language production in which the question of standards does not arise. Consciousness of language refers to the activity of reflecting upon the use of language by oneself and others. Such reflection can take many forms, from taboo to rhyme to folk etymology to prescriptive rules to Government and Binding Theory. Specific sections address the following: (1) consciousness of language as a cultural universal; (2) linguistics and the marginalization of consciousness; (3) overview of standardization theory; and (4) modeling the linguistic consciousness: Krashen's "Monitor."

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LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE

John E. Joseph

1. 'Consciousness of Language' as A Cultural Universal

This paper takes as its premise the idea, discussed at length in Joseph (1987), that the study of language standards and standard languages must make reference to a different level of **consciousness** from that associated with the sort of 'naive' language production in which the question of standards does not arise. In common metaphorical usage, the level of consciousness implicated in language standards and standard languages may be said to be 'higher' than that of naive language production.

It is no simple matter to discuss the relationship between language and consciousness. First of all, what we understand as 'consciousness' is based largely upon language, and vice-versa. For present purposes, let us take **consciousness of language** to mean the activity of **reflecting** upon the use of language by oneself and others. Such reflection can take many forms, from taboo to rhyme to folk etymology to prescriptive rules to Government-and-Binding Theory. All of these are expressions of linguistic consciousness.

Consciousness of language as so defined is a **universal** feature of human cultures.[1] It appears to be a derivative activity, stemming from the interaction of two other independent systems: the language faculty, and a general faculty for reflective thinking. But there is no rational basis for supposing that its derivative nature diminishes its significance. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that the interaction of these two systems shapes and reshapes each of them in fundamental ways.[2]

Not all of the various manifestations of consciousness of language mentioned above exist in every culture. It is probably true that in every speech community there is some awareness of how **well** certain people use the language relative to others. At least, the total absence of such quality judgments is difficult to imagine, so long as any **variation** exists within the speech community; and variation is unquestionably a universal feature of human speech. But the particular form such value judgments take varies from culture to culture. And within any given culture, the degree of linguistic consciousness is variable from individual to individual, both in overall intensity and in the attention given to particular aspects.

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2. Linguistics and the Marginalization of Consciousness

As a cultural universal, consciousness of language is on a par with religion. Here again, the overall phenomenon is universal, yet particular forms of expression vary among cultures and among individuals within a culture. Atheism, for instance, is forbidden by some cultures (e.g. European culture at least to the mid-16th century), permitted in others (e.g. contemporary Western European cultures), officially imposed in still others (e.g. communist cultures). Similarly, within some cultures there have developed subcultures which deny the validity of consciousness of language. Instead, they treat language as an idealized system, disembodied from the speakers who 'know' and 'use' it.

The most prominent such subculture is the discipline which has been regarded since the early 19th century as 'scientific linguistics'. It is my own discipline. As a 'scientific linguist', I am part of a small minority of those persons involved professionally with language. Judgments regarding quality of language have traditionally been excluded from scientific linguistic inquiry. It has been assumed that only 'descriptive' linguistics, which takes as its domain the **unconscious** knowledge of language, can be studied in an objective and scientific way. With rare exceptions, prescriptivism and other forms of linguistic consciousness have been excluded from serious linguistic inquiry.[3]

This is, however, a completely irrational position.[4] There is no a priori reason why any facet of human behavior, individual or cultural, cannot be studied in an objective and scientific way. The marginalization of 'conscious linguistics' has been an **ideological** development masquerading as a **scientific** one -- though it is not clear to what extent the two types are ever really distinguishable (see Joseph 1990a, Joseph and Taylor 1990).[5]

I do not challenge the idea that the conscious and unconscious modes of linguistic knowledge need to be studied **separately**. The language 'system' is a fascinating object of study, and this study should continue to be pursued in an 'autonomous' fashion, though ideally with a greater awareness on the part of linguists of the metaphorical and metaphysical nature of their enterprise.[6]

What I do not accept, however, is the idea that consciousness of language cannot **also** be studied in an objective and scientific way. Not only is such a study possible, but it is **necessary** if autonomous linguistics is ever to be truly 'scientific', rather than internally dependent upon its own metaphors and rhetoric (see further Joseph 1989a). By marginalizing standardization to the point of ignoring it, 'mainstream' linguistics has put itself in the unfortunate position of mixing language production from different levels of consciousness within its data base, and treating them implicitly as though they were identical (see also Grace 1990 and Romaine 1989). Such indiscriminate contamination of data, such disregard for the most fundamental aspects of human thought, run counter to everything the notion of 'science' has ever stood for.

3. Overview of Standardization Theory

The theory or model of language standardization put forth in Joseph (1987) has as its goal to understand what standard languages are and how they come into existence. Distinguishing between **language standards** and **standard languages** allows us to disambiguate two related but very different processes usually referred to by the single term 'language standardization'. Language standards are the normative judgments made about a particular language by whoever be the arbiters within a particular culture, and enforced by persons such as teachers, editors, and grammarians. The standard language is a language for which a significant body of such standards has been produced; before this happened, it was one dialect among others within a 'language' conceived as a system of related dialects, and for some reason (usually political or socio-economic, but sometimes also literary) this particular dialect's prestige has outstripped that of its rivals. The **emergence** of a dialect to standard status may be deliberately **engineered** by partisans of the dialect, or it may be merely **circumstantial**.

The creation of language standards for a particular standard language is not arbitrary. The standards are usually based upon a pre-existing model. Greek provided the model for the standardization of Latin, and Latin was the model for the modern European standards (French, Italian, Hungarian, etc). Some of these languages would eventually serve as models for standardizing the languages of peoples whom the Europeans conquered and whose lands they colonized.[7]

The first phase of standardization is one of **elaboration**: new elements are borrowed into the arising standard from its model. Much of the elaboration process takes place through translation from the model language. Elaboration may be **remedial**, to compensate for a perceived incapacity for expression, or **cosmetic**, if borrowed even though a native element is available. Elaboration continues to be the order of the day until such time as the language is perceived as sufficiently 'eloquent', i.e. capable of functioning in all the genres and modes of the model language.

At this point the balance may shift in the direction of **control**, the desire to 'regulate' the language by hierarchizing rival modes of expression and attempting to suppress those which wind up low on the hierarchy. Control is the domain of teachers, editors, grammarians, language academies, etc. It is motivated by, on the one hand, a very rational desire to keep the linguistic system economical (a problem in the wake of elaboration), but on the other hand by a rather unrealistic desire to eliminate language change. To the extent that it does succeed in keeping the standard 'pure' of changes taking place naturally in its vernacular dialect base, control leads to the standard eventually becoming a 'classical' language -- in other words, to its 'death'.

In Joseph (1987) I argue against the traditional structuralist treatment of language standardization as a process that is implicitly universal or 'polygenetic' (having several independent historical origins). Rather, we should distinguish between the general aspects of linguistic consciousness discussed in 1 above, which **are** universal, and the specific series of developments which produces a standard language in the current internationally accepted sense of the term, which instead represents one particular, non-universal set of choices from the larger, universal set of possibilities.

In this view, language standardization represents a culture-specific, **monogenetic** process cum ideology that has its origins in the Greco-Roman cultural tradition and has subsequently been transmitted throughout Europe and thence to most of the rest of the world. In particular, several facets of the Western concept of standard languages can be traced to the specific influence of alphabetic writing, which itself has a monogenetic origin, having been developed only in Greece, and transmitted thence to wherever else it has subsequently existed.

Here again it is essential to disambiguate between two entities which have been misleadingly thrown together: the **universal** roots of linguistic quality judgments, and the particular **historical** product of Western culture that has been alternately imposed upon and borrowed by other cultures subjected to Western influence. This is necessary not only to clarify our understanding of the historical process, but to undo a notion of Western superiority covertly hidden away within the polygenetic view. For if it is in fact true that any language, left to its own devices, might eventually develop the distinctive features and accoutrements of a standard language in the accepted Western sense -- and given that our definition of a standard language is based on the Western European prototype -- any comparison of Western and non-Western standard languages is inevitably going to make the former appear to be more highly developed than the latter. But by **historicizing** the process which in the structuralist tradition was treated as ahistorical, we can interpret degrees of standardization as they ought to be interpreted, as having nothing to do with cultural 'advancement' in any sort of general and objective sense, but merely with degree of historical progress along the path of acculturation.

4. Modeling the linguistic consciousness: Krashen's 'Monitor'

At least one significant discourse about levels of consciousness in linguistic production has been underway for over a decade, in the field known variously as 'applied linguistics' and 'second-language acquisition'. It offers at least a partial framework for a similar discourse in the realm of language standardization.[8]

Stephen Krashen's model of foreign language learning, which has been very influential in America since the late 1970s, posits that adult language learning

takes place at two levels, one basically unconscious and the other basically conscious (see Krashen 1981, 1982, 1985). Krashen uses the term **learning** specifically for the conscious mode, wherein rules are acquired through study, memorization, and so on. As for the unconscious process of creating rules in order to comprehend spoken and written input, Krashen calls this **acquisition**.

Acquisition is the same process by which children obtain their unconscious knowledge of their native language. They hear it spoken around them, and unconsciously infer rules as to its operation. These rules are at first often overly general, but are refined over time until they correspond in most details to the rules of the adults around them. Remaining idiosyncracies are likely to be leveled out through contact with other children, but a small number will instead survive and be spread among other children. This is the major source of language change -- the phenomenon which language standardization is largely instantiated in order to stop (see 3 above).

Krashen's critique of foreign language teaching has centered around its insufficient concern with acquisition, the 'natural' process which leads to fluent, native-like language production. Instead, classroom language teaching has traditionally focused on conscious learning. In Krashen's model, 'learned' knowledge does not contribute directly to fluent language production, although some leakage from learning to acquisition is possible. Rather, this body of consciously attained knowledge acts as what he calls a **Monitor**. It is as if the conscious mind 'listens' to the spontaneous output of the unconscious rule system before it is actually uttered, checking it for errors. While some self-correction is good, an overactive Monitor will impede fluent language production. Downplaying the role of the Monitor has thus been Krashen's primary concern.

In marginalizing conscious linguistic processes, Krashen stands squarely in the tradition of scientific linguistics as practiced from the early 19th century to the present day.[9] Nevertheless, the simple fact of having opened up a discourse on language and consciousness represents an important step forward. The question at hand is whether Krashen's model of linguistic consciousness can be adapted to the domain of language standardization, and if so, whether it has anything substantial to offer. The following discussion will focus therefore upon points of contact and divergence between the two domains, followed by some considerations of a practical nature regarding application of the model in education.

The most obvious obstacle to adaptation lies in the fact that Krashen's model is designed to account for second-language acquisition beyond the 'critical age', the moment around puberty when, whether for physiological or (more likely) psychological reasons, most people lose the ability to acquire languages in a native-like fashion. With standard languages and language standards, on the other hand, we are primarily interested in their effect on people's knowledge of

their **native** language, an effect that may begin in the very earliest stages of language production and that, thanks to universal education, is directly aimed at from early childhood through the 'critical age' and beyond.

In other words, education in the standard language consists of helping (or forcing) children to develop a sort of Monitor for their own native language production, to check for elements of their native dialect which do not correspond to the rules of the standard language. Because of this, adults come to second-language learning with a Monitor already intact; it is reasonable to assume that they set about the tasks of second-language learning in very much the same way as they went about their standard-language education in their native tongue.

'Native' poses an obvious terminological problem here. It is in the nature of language standards and standard languages to stand as a barrier to 'natural' language acquisition, which, as explained in 3 above, inevitably brings 'natural' language change. Language standards are that part of standard languages which must be **learned,** which are unlikely to be acquired. It is precisely because of their difficulty of acquisition -- their 'unnaturalness' to the linguistic system -- that they are able to function as 'standards' at all. For this reason, the standard language is never really, fully 'native' (i.e. the 'maternal' language in anything like a literal sense) to anyone.[10]

Adults, then, come to second-language learning with a Monitor already developed (well or poorly), but an unconscious acquisition faculty that has become weakly operative, either because of psychological barriers or physiological atrophy. Their goal is to reinvigorate their acquisition faculty, and to keep their Monitor under control lest it become an obstacle to fluent language production. Children, on the contrary, come to standard-language learning with no Monitor, but a fully operative acquisition faculty. Their goal is to develop a Monitor for the specific purpose of tempering their natural acquisition faculty with a body of socially codified rules. They can continue 'learning' elements of the standard language past the 'critical age', indeed throughout their lives, and 'leakage' from learning to acquisition can continue to take place, just as in second-language learning.

The Monitor can become a problem in standard-language learning, much as it can in second-language learning. It is by just such a view that we might account for the phenomenon of **hypercorrection,** where errors are generated by the overapplication of rules (e.g. English between you and I instead of between you and me.) Furthermore, overuse of the Monitor and excessive leakage from the Monitor into acquisition are likely to result in one's language being perceived as inappropriate, overly formal, stylistically dry, Latinate.

Language teachers have used Krashen's model to justify a shift of emphasis away from **achievement** tests, which evaluate how many discrete points one has learned, and toward **proficiency** tests, which evaluate globally how much one has acquired. Outside of the second-language domain, our perceptions of other

people's 'intelligence' is regularly based upon the 'standardness' of their language, as a result of what I call the **cognitive fallacy:** the implicit belief that standard-language use correlates with general cognitive ability. Willinsky (1986) has pointed out that North American school systems tend to reinforce this problem. Students who perform well on intelligence tests -- even on those which are supposedly more 'cognitive' and less language-dependent -- go into classes where they focus on free composition rather than grammar rules, i.e. language standards.[11] Students who perform poorly on such tests go instead into grammar classes. Thus, 'One group of students has had their attention directed to the avoidance of errors, an inducement to silence, while another was prompted to develop their voices, that they might be heard" (Willinsky 1986: 136). This is one of the mechanisms by which social stratifications are cemented and maintained, even by teachers who believe their mission to be quite the opposite.

The Monitor model has had proven success in convincing foreign-language teachers to adjust their methods and criteria of evaluation. It might well have similar success in getting other teachers to recognize standard-language ability for what it is: a learned capacity for the enforcement of socially codified rules that has little to do with any other cognitive abilities, and a potential impediment to free and full linguistic expression. At the same time, it embodies a cultural universal which it would be naive and irresponsible of us to imagine we can ignore.

If all the contributors to this volume agree on anything, it is surely that the goal of education should be the furtherance of social equality, not the maintenance or expansion of inqualities. This suggests that our educational systems should aim for a better balance between the 'standard' and the 'natural', between achievement and proficiency, between linguistically-dependent and independent measures of intelligence. The Monitor model offers a promising means of helping people understand the issues involved.[12]

5. Conclusion

Consciousness of language, a cultural universal, is the basis of language standards and standard languages. Unfortunately, modern linguistics has excluded consciousness of language from its sphere of inquiry. This exclusion had ideological and historical causes, and is not necessary for the scientificness of the linguistic enterprise, as is traditionally claimed. To the contrary, linguistics will never be truly scientific until this exclusion is undone. Krashen's model of acquisition and learning provides a useful basis for analyzing the different levels of consciousness of language that are involved in language standards and standard languages.

In 2 above, I drew a comparison between modern linguistics and atheism, both of which are founded upon the rejection of a cultural universal. It would seem (especially in light of recent events in Eastern Europe) that even in the case of official state atheism the religious element of culture never fully disappears. Either its place is taken by a sort of worship of the state, or else traditional religious beliefs persist beneath the surface to reemerge at a later time. Similarly, the forms of linguistic consciousness which linguists have banned from scientific inquiry are so deeply engrained in culture, in every culture, that their eventual reemergence is inevitable. Ideologies that run counter to cultural universals are no more likely to persist over time than are linguistic features which run counter to linguistic universals. They are, if you like, too highly 'marked'.

NOTES

(1) However, unlike the language faculty itself -- which is the human cultural universal par excellence -- consciousness of language has never been ascribed specific biological roots. That is, no one has suggested a 'language consciousness organ' innate in the human brain, in parallel with Chomsky's 'language organ'.

(2) The development of reflective thinking is so closely bound up with the development of language in the child that any attempt to study their interaction remains fraught with the danger of circular reasoning.

(3) The outstanding exceptions are Jespersen (1925); the work of several of the Czech members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, especially Havranek and Mukarovsky (see Joseph 1987 for references); and Kloss (1978 [1st ed. 1952]). A considerable number of structuralists, American as well as European, wrote occasional pieces on standardization in the 1950s and 1960s, but the subject lapsed back into obscurity with the rise of generative linguistics in the late 1960s and 1970s. Generativism, with its emphasis on innate aspects of language use, has marginalized the cultural and conscious aspects of language to a greater extent than any of its predecessors. If it is true that the study of standardization has returned to prominence in the 1980s, it has not been through the direct participation of any generativists, though something is owed to their fragmentation, which has had the effect of promoting greater diversity of thought within the field.

(4) Like many other irrational positions -- virgin birth and resurrection from the dead, for example -- this one serves as a 'test of faith'. Were this rejection of a cultural universal not so counter-intuitive, it could not serve so well as a litmus test for linguistic orthodoxy.

(5) The reasons for linguists' rejection of the conscious aspects of language production are complex, and one must resist oversimplifying them. Besides ideology, they have involved academic-political motivations which have themselves been largely excluded from linguistic historiography. The origins of the rejection were ideological: the earliest 'scientific' linguistics, the historical inquiry of the early 19th century, was part of the general Romantic movement and its desire to capture the essence of the National Spirit by delving backward into the language of the common folk. By mid-century, efforts were underway to restrict inquiry to 'untutored' dialects, rather than the urban, 'artificial' standard languages. (For further details, see Joseph 1987 and 1989b; also Note 10 below.) When the emphasis of linguistics shifted from diachrony to synchrony, the prejudice against consciousness of language remained intact, this time for academic-political reasons. When historically-trained linguists like William Dwight Whitney and Ferdinand de Saussure attempted to shift inquiry into a synchronic mode, they found themselves in a territory dispute with a powerful

rival, the long-established and deeply entrenched interests of psychology departments in American and European universities. Establishing the autonomy of linguistic inquiry necessitated a shift of emphasis away from anything like levels of consciousness which might appear to place language within the psychological domain, in favor of the social dimension of language (see Joseph 1990b).

(6) My own 'straight' linguistic work (to quote Scaglione 1989) maintains the necessary suspension of disbelief, the pretense that language as system **exists** in some kind of real, non-metaphorical, non-metaphysical, supra-individual way.

(7) Dozens of particular examples, involving all levels of language structure, are given in Joseph (1987).

(8) It is highly ironic that a supposedly 'applied' area should be possessed of a theory so far advanced over that of its 'theoretical' counterpart.

(9) To place him within a tradition already described as ideological and academic-political is not to pass judgment on the pedagogical value of his model, which is not at issue here. My own observation has been that Krashen's model has generally had a positive effect when used to achieve a better balance between the unconscious and conscious modes, but a negative effect when it has been taken beyond this to marginalize the conscious mode unduly.

(10) There is a danger here of falling into the trap of another Romantic notion, the idea that the unconscious mind is natural and pure, while the conscious mind is evil. Actually, this notion has the deepest possible roots in Western culture: in Judeo-Christianity, the 'original sin' of Adam and Eve consisted of eating from the Tree of **Knowledge**, for which act they were banished from Paradise. This notion may also play a part in the anti-conscious ideology of modern linguistics (see Note 5 above).

(11) Interestingly, these are also the students who are most likely to be placed in foreign-language classes. Since they are the ones who already have the best-developed Monitors in their 'native' standard, it is not surprising that overactive Monitors should be such a widespread problem among North American second-language learners.

(12) Again, the problem is achieving a **balance** without excessively minimizing the importance of the learned, conscious domain; the danger is that we linguists, to whom it logically falls to make this case to the educational establishment, have a two hundred years history of going overboard.

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